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# COLONIAL BERTIE COUNTY

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John E. Tyler

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County Historians and Historiographer of the Diocese
of East Carolina.

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# IN
# COLONIAL BERTIE COUNTY

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The lower end of the Bertie Peninsula was populated sufficiently by the close of the seventeenth century to attract the attention of the Church of England to its religious needs. At that time present Bertie County was a part of Chowan precinct in Albemarle County and was known as the West or Southwest Shore, due to its geographical position in regard to the Chowan River. This territory, therefore, came under the jurisdiction of Saint Paul's Parish which was established for Chowan Precinct by Act of the Assembly on Nov. 12, 1701. However, a month later, on December 12, 1701, at the organization of the first vestry of St. Paul's Parish we find the earliest official steps being taken toward the organization of the Church of England in what is now Bertie County. At this meeting which took place at the home of Mr. Thomas Gilliam, preparations were made for building a church at the Town on Queen Anne's Creek (Edenton). At the same time the inhabitants of the Southwest Shore (Bertie County) were authorized, after the parish church should be finished, to build a chapel of ease. A separate reader was also to be employed for this chapel by either Col. Thomas Pollock or William Duckenfield, Esq. These two men, who were members of that first St. Paul's Vestry, the oldest continuous corporation in North Carolina, were both residents of Bertie County. Later, in 1712, we find record of Saint Paul's Vestry meeting here in Bertie County at the home of Col. Thomas Pollock.

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As for the chapel of ease that was authorized, it is doubted that it was ever erected as the Rev. Giles Bainford in a letter of 1712 speaks of the West Shore "where there is no church". However, regardless of the fact that no chapel had been built, services were conducted on the West Shore by the missionary ministers sent out from England by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. From the minutes of St. Paul's Vestry for June 1711-12 is found the schedule of the Rev. John Urmsten for officiating at services. It speaks of "one Sunday on the South Shore, then the next two on the Western Shore (Bertie) alternately".

That the West Shore was growing rapidly seems to be implied when in 1712 the Rev. Giles Rainford arrived in the colony to assist Mr. Urmsten, it was proposed that he supply only it while Mr. Urmsten would take care of the rest of the field.

More definite proof of the increase in population on the Bertie Peninsula is shown by the Vestry Act of 1715. By an act of the North Carolina Assembly, the province was divided into nine parishes and what seven years later was to become Bertie County was, then in 1715, established, in regard to the Church of England, as the Southwest Parish of Chowan Precinct. The creation of this parish was the earliest establishment of a religious organization to exist in Bertie County.

The first vestry of the new Southwest Parish was composed of the following men: Col. Thomas Pollock; Co. William Maule; William Duckenfield, Esq.; Major Robert West; Captain John Bird; Mr. John Hardy; John Worley, Esq.; Mr. John Holbrook; Mr. Robert Lanier; Mr. Lend Sarson; Mr. Lewis Williams; and Mr. Lewis Bryant. A number of these men still have descendents living throughout Bertie County, today.

In 1721, the Southwest Parish acquired considerable land on which to build a church. This property was a gift from William Duckenfield. The record of the conveyance is still in existence and reads as follows:

"Wm. Duckenfield to the Church Wardens and the rest of the Vestry of the South-West Parish do give and grant them 52 acres of land, lying on

the North-West side of Ducking Run, Beginning at the first small branch below the Nots bridge or mill dam on Ducking Run, and running up the run into ye woods, so that it may be laid into a Geometrical Square, to hold all the land (except two acres adjoining the mill-dam to be for the use of a mill to be laid out in a Geometrical Square) to them and their successors forever, for a Glebe or for building a church or chapell and whatever uses the Vestry and their successors may think convenient for promoting the true Worship of God". Oct. 17, 1721, Testators: Samuel Warren, James Ward and Thomas West.

According to the late J. R. B. Hathaway this church was built at what, in 1909, was called "Chapel Bridge within one mile of Merry Hill (Nichols Cross Roads). He also states that the foundation of the old mill spoken of in the deed could still (1900) be seen.

In 1722, the year in which Bertie County was officially created, the name of the Southwest Parish was changed to that of Society Parish. It was given this new name as an honor to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in foreign Parts, an organization in the Church of England which had been established to aid its missionary work. It is only natural that the parish should have acquired a new name when Bertie was formed for it then ceased to be the Southwest portion of Chowan Precinct.

A church for Society Parish was built near Merry Hill on the site which had been donated by William Duckenfield. It was given the name of Saint Thomas and served the members of the Church of England in colonial Bertie County until the Revolution.

Though the Church of England was established by law, with parishes laid out and Vestries appointed, its progress in the colony was very slow. Life in Carolina was still very primitive and a great number of the inhabitants took an indifferent attitude toward religion. In 1726 Sir Richard Everand, Governor of North Carolina, in a letter to the Bishop of London, who had jurisdiction of the Church in the colony, said "I beg your Lordship favors us with a missionary for Bertie, now a most heathenish part of America and have no sect among us except Quakers, who daily increase.

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We want a sober and pious man". Such was the condition according to Governor Everard.

Besides the attitude of indifference, many of the early settlers had a more pronounced feeling of hostility toward the Church of England because of the fact that it was a state religion established by law. In spite of this the Church survived, gathering its main support from the gentry. The most prominent and prosperous families in the county, on coming to America had wished to transplant in the wilderness their way of life, its customs and usages, as it had existed in their native England. The Church of England was a part of that life.

Among the outstanding Bertie families who took an active interest in the English Church was that of William Duckenfield, a Justice of the General Court. As already stated he was a member of the first Vestry in North Carolina and gave the land on which was built the first church in Bertie County. From Burke's Peerage it is learned that the name had been formerly De Dokenfield. William Duckenfield of Bertie County was a brother of Sir Robert Duckenfield, Baronet, son of a noted colonel in the Parliamentary Army. The next of this Bertie County family, Nathaniel Duckenfield, appeared to be an enlightened churchman as is evidenced by his letters to the Bishop of London in 1724. This Nathaniel Duckenfield was the father of a son of the said name. The son, at the beginning of the Revolutionary War returned to England, having inherited the baronetcy of Chester County, as his kinsman, Sir Samuel Duckenfield had died without male issue. He purchased an office in the British Army, but at his request was allowed not to fight against America and his recently abandoned Carolina homeland.

During the several generations this family had been residents of Bertie County it had ardently supported the Church of England. Its devotion is further seen by the fact that after returning to England one of the sons, the Rev. Charles Egerton Duckenfield became vicar of Eden Hall and another son, the Rev. Henry Robert, was also in Holy Orders.

From existing records it is learned that the Church Wardens for

Society Parish from April 7th, 1729 to April 7th, 1730 were Thomas Hart and Needham Bryan. The wardens for the same parish in 1735 and 1736 were John Wynns and Thomas Sutton.

Among the Church of England ministers who served Society Parish of Bertie County was Thomas Flyed. He was in charge of this parish in 1767 for in that year Governor Tryon reported to London that the Rev. Mr. Floyd had been established there by letters of presentation from the Governor.

In January, 1768 Francis Johnston and Henry Burgess left for England to take Holy Orders. They were recommended by Governor Tryon and the Rev. Thomas Burgess, the father of Henry John Burgess. The young men were made deacons and ordained priest by the Lord Bishop of London, after which they returned to North Carolina to take up the work of the church. In 1770 the Rev. Francis Johnston located in Bertie County to succeed the Rev. Mr. Floyd as rector of Society Parish. Mr. Johnston on coming into the field remarked that the "parish is capable to maintain and willing to receive a minister". The Rev. Mr. Johnston continued as rector of Society Parish until the fall of 1777, when he left for the West Indies as an exile, rather than take the oath of allegiance to the new state government.

Besides the Saint Thomas Chapel which had been built near Merry Hill, it is known that at least two other Church of England Chapels were built in Society Parish. Both of these chapels took their names from prominent Bertie County families. One was called "Outlaw's Chapel" of which little is known. The other was "Pugh's Chapel" which was located at the present town of Lewiston. This chapel continued to serve the Episcopal Church long after the Revolution.[X] It was here that the Rev. William Norwood, D. D. commenced his ministry about 1831. Later Pugh's Chapel was moved from its original site and was taken down after it had gone into private hands.

From 1715 to 1727 the Southwest or Society Parish was the only one in the county. In 1727, however, we find that a new and separate parish was formed in the Northwest part of Bertie. Due to its geographical position in the county it was given the name Northwest Parish. One of the first ministers

[X] Pugh's chapel was used by the Baptist faith about the time of the Revolution, however. Reference to it is found in Burkitt + Read — History of the Kehukee Association.

of this Northwest Parish was the Rev. John Boyd, a graduate of the University of Glasgow and for some years a physician in Virginia. He moved into North Carolina and in 1732 became the colony's first canidate for Holy Orders. After having been ordained in England he returned to Carolina to become rector of the Northwest Parish in Bertie. It is said that there were no dissenters in this parish and that the people seemed eager for his services. The Rev. Mr. Boyd reported to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel that private subscriptions had been started to build four chapels. In 1737 Commissary Garden wrote to the Bishop of London that he had heard bad reports of Mr. Boyd, that he was intemperate and neglected his duties. However about this time Mr. Boyd seems to have died still one of the missionaries of the Society.

From existing records it appears that Mr. Boyd was succeeded by the Rev. John Holms. At the General Court for the colony in March 1740 we find Mr. Holms bringing suit against John Pope and John Brown, former wardens, and Samuel Williams and George Downing who were then church wardens of the Northwest Parish for the collection of back salaries. The Vestry for the Northwest Parish had on July 7, 1739 contracted to pay Mr. Holms a salary of 200 pounds to preach at the houses of Joseph Sims, H. Jones, Henry Walker, Capt. Joseph Lane, at the Bertie County Court House, Mr. Maney's Chapel, at the houses of William Arrington and Phillip Thomas.

In 1741 Northampton County was formed out of Bertie, taking with it the Northwest Parish. Sandy Run (or Branch) which flows into the Roanoke River, had formed part of the boundry between the Northwest and Society Parishes. This run now became part of the dividing line between the two counties. As was often the case where the Church of England had established parishes before counties were formed, we find county lines coinciding with the previously created parish boundaries. The Northwest Parish now located in Northampton County was divided in 1758 by the Colonial Assembly into two parishes named Northwest and Saint George. The following Vestrymen were named for the Northwest Parish: William Murfree, James Washington, James Turner, Samuel

Thomas, Joseph Sykes, Charles Skinner, William Battle, Joseph Smith, Benj. Doherry, Robert Warren, James Maney, and John Figures. The Vestrymen for St. George Parish were William Cathcart, John Jones, William Allen, Marwood Jones, Thomas Barrett, William Winborne, Green Hill, John Dukes, William Pace, Thomas Winborne and William Short.

When Hertford County was formed in 1759 from parts of Northampton, Bertie and Chowan it also embraced a new parish known as St. Barnabas. The location of the one time county seat for Bertie was now in the boundaries of the new county of Hertford. Here ~~had been~~ was built a chapel called St. John's, which gave to the community about it the same name. St. John's was for a long number of years a center of religious and cultural development. One of the notable rectors which had served St. John's Chapel was the Rev. Mr. Mathais Brickell, who was brother to Dr. John Brickell, the naturalist and historian. The Rev. Mr. Brickell's oldest son, Col. Matt Brickell was also a prominent Hertford County figure. He was a member of the first three Provincial Congresses. Two of the daughters of this family married Col. Hardy Murfree and Major John Brown, both outstanding men of their day. After the Rev. Mr. Brickell's death, St. John's and St. Luke's or Buckhorn were served by the Rev. Mr. William Gurley.

Later we find at both Wiccacon Chapel in the lower portion of Hertford and Outlaw's Chapel in Bertie, the Rev. John Alexander. This minister was licensed by the Bishop of London to Georgia in 1766, but he found his way to North Carolina and Bertie County. We learn much of this saintly man's character from his will which was probated in Bertie in 1799. This will, though short, has proven so remarkable and interesting that it has been printed in its entirety in two separate North Carolina Historical volumes.* In it he states of his two daughters "let their books and their needles be their chief employ" and should they die before coming of age that his estate should go to educating the poor children of Hertford and Bertie Counties. Though he left

*1. Public Education in North Carolina, A Documentary History. 1790-1840 - Vol. I.

2. Hathaway, N. C. Historical & Genealogical Register.

no male issue, through his daughters, John Alexander was the ancestor of many of the Outlaw descendants, the same family which had given its name to the Church of England Chapel which he had served.

In 1765 clergymen of the Church of England were allowed annually the sum of six hundred and fifty dollars by the Province and another hundred from the bounty of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. They were in addition furnished a residence and two hundred acres of globe lands. By law they were allowed fees for celebrating marriages and preaching funeral sermons. Though a great number of the ministers of the Church of England left the Province at the opening of the Revolution some remained and took up the patroit's cause. Among these were the Rev. Charles E. Taylor in Northampton, the Rev. William Gurley in Hertford and the Rev. John Alexander in Bertie. After the colonies won their independence and the United States came into being, the remnants of the stranded Church of England were reorganized into the Episcopal Church. Society Parish had then become obsolete, but the St. Thomas Chapel near Merry Hill still remained and during the early struggling years of the Episcopal Church, services were occassionally held there.

However, many of the chapels which had been built during the colonial days became abandoned and deteriorated rapidly from disuse. Some chapels were taken over by other denominations.X In 1782 members of the Baptist faith attempted to use the St. John's Chapel in Hertford County (where the ancient county seat of Bertie once stood). They held that the chapel had been erected by money collected from the people of the county by taxation and that no Episcopal service was then being conducted there and as a result the Baptist constituting the majority of the people had a right to its use. Arriving at the chapel they were opposed by Col. Robert Sumner, who as senior warden of St. John's, objected to its being used for any purpose other than the Episcopal service. Capt. Arthur Cotten who was the junior warden of St. John's was of the opinion that under the circumstances the Baptist were entitled to its use, thus the two wardens of the church became engaged in a rather heated dispute. The situation was finally remedied when Capt. Cotten offered the

X Outlaw's chapel was taken over by the Baptist. The Chowan Baptist Association held one of its annual conventions there in 1815. Minutes of this meeting in Wake Forest library.

delegations the hospitality of his home, "Mulberry Grove".

Perhaps the most outstanding clergyman of the Church of England in North Carolina who worked toward the development of the Episcopal Church after the Revolution, lived for several years in Bertie County. This was the Rev. Charles Pettigrew. Born in Pennsylvania in 1743, the son of James Pettigrew, he was ordained in England in 1774-75. He succeeded the Rev. Daniel Earl as rector of St. Paul's in Edenton. In 1778 he married Mary Blound, daughter of Col. John Blount, by whom he had two sons, John Pettigrew and Ebenezer Pettigrew. From the latter was descended the Civil War General, James Johnston Pettigrew.

After his first wife's death, the Rev. Mr. Pettigrew married, in 1794, Mary Lockhart of Bertie County. She was the daughter of James Lockhart, a native of Glasgow, Scotland and his wife, Elizabeth Lillington, a sister of General Alexander Lillington of the Revolution. The Lockharts lived at famed Scotch Hall on the sound and to this country seat the Rev. Mr. Pettigrew came to live for a few years before he and his family moved to Tyrrell County in 1797. The Rev. Mr. Pettigrew was a leading figure in the first efforts at organizing the Episcopal Church in North Carolina after the Revolution and in 1794 was elected the first Bishop of North Carolina. Due to irregularities of the meetings of the General Convention and his own poor health, he was never consecrated. While living in Bertie the Rev. Mr. Pettigrew conducted services at the old chapel of St. Thomas. At times Mr. Avery, the rector of St. Paul's in Edenton would come over to Bertie and preach at this colonial church.

St. Thomas Chapel was finally destroyed by fire about 1840, however for many years no regular services had been held in it. The late Mr. Lorenzo Webb of Windsor had in his possession the old English Prayer Book that had been used by the Rev. Mr. Pettigrew when he preached there. Both Mr. Webb and his father were baptized within the walls of that ancient edifice. Though the colonial chapel of St. Thomas no longer exist, its name lives on through the years, for from it developed the present St. Thomas Episcopal

Church at Windsor.

THE END.

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